

[By Bob Kinzel, Vermont Public Radio](#)

(Host) Congressman Peter Welch is backing legislation that he says will help protect thousands of elderly Vermonters from a significant increase in Medicare premiums.

Welch is a co-sponsor of a bill that freezes 'Medicare Part B' premiums for a one year period. It just passed the U.S House with broad bi-partisan support.

Welch says the freeze is needed because Social Security recipients aren't expected to receive an annual cost of living increase this year. He says that will pose a hardship for about 50,000 elderly Vermonters who rely on Social Security as their primary source of income.

Premiums for the Medicare Part B are expected to go up about 20% next year and Welch says the increase will place a difficult financial burden on many older Vermonters:

(Welch) "It would be very, very hard on them when you have no cost of living increase number one and number two an increase in the cost of their Medicare so this legislation is going to keep their Medicare premium exactly level and that's going to be a big benefit for Vermont seniors."

(Host) Welch says the legislation will be financed by taking money from the Medicare Improvement Fund and he says the bill is only a temporary solution:

(Welch) "So this is a one year fix you know. This is raising really the problem that we have in our whole economy and not just for seniors. And that is, the cost of health care is going up too fast. It's beyond what we can afford, so it is really part of the reason I feel so strongly about having a major health care overhaul."

(Host) The legislation now goes to the U.S. Senate for its consideration.